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ABSTRACT

The stories, essays, poems, and anecdotes in this booklet were written by students attending community-based literacy classes and they reflect the students' varied lives and experiences. Many of these pieces are appropriate for adult beginning readers and may encourage students to write their own stories that in turn may be read by others. The material is unedited except for spelling and some punctuation and capitalization. Many pieces are responses to identified selections read aloud in class by the teacher, including poems by Maya Angelou. (YLB)

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The NEW Magazine

Original writings by participants in NEW's Adult Basic Education Program

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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This booklet was written by students attending community based literacy classes and reflects their varied lives and experiences. Booklets in this series of eleven contain stories, essays, poems and anecdotes, many of which are appropriate for adult beginning readers. CDA hopes that using these booklets will encourage students to write their own stories which in turn may be read by others.

Funding for this project has been provided by the Adult Literacy Initiative of the Municipal Assistance Corporation and the NYS Education Department.

NEW's Adult Basic Education program is an integral part of our effort to help women feel better about themselves, enhancing self-respect and leading to self-sufficiency. Many participants are directed to the program because they need to sharpen basic skills in order to qualify for job-training but others come simply because "it's time": They want to be able to help their children with homework, are ashamed that they can't; they've become bored and somewhat disgusted with themselves for "getting fat, sitting in front of the TV all day"; they want to take a first step toward getting off welfare.

Our participants test in with grade levels anywhere from 0 to 8th grade in verbal and mathematical skills. There is considerable variation within the fluctuating morning and afternoon groups, and the small classes provide ample opportunity for individual attention and custom tailoring. Students soon identify themselves as participants in their own teaching, as well as their own learning. Discussions are often free-wheeling, every encouragement given to development of verbal skills and critical thinking. Daily writing is a must, no matter the level, nor the mechanical prowress. Initially, participants are told to write what is on their minds without worrying about spelling and punctuation.

They speak for themselves on the following pages.

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Reactions to "Mom Can't Read" by Muriel Stanek

Today the story was about a mother and her small child named Tina. Tina was not a good reader, so to help her improve her reading skills the teacher gave her a small book to take home for her mother to help her read.

Tina asked Mom over and over to read to her but Mom always made excuses when in reality Mom couldn't read. I'm sure she must have felt quite embarrassed. I was able to reflect on the fact that there are people that can't read.

I feel that Mom should have told Tina a long time ago that she couldn't read; it would have stopped all Mom's pain on that fact. She also would have gotten help much sooner as she did in the end.

by Deborah Hawkins

The book "My Mom Can't Read" reminds me of how I always try to get out of reading. When one of my sons comes and asks me to help him with his homework, I

make up all kinds of excuses. After he got older he would tell me you don't know anything. I would carry a book to make it look like I really know how to read.

When I was around friends, I would play like I didn't hear when I was asked to read something I couldn't read or I would pretend I read it when in fact I didn't. It's very depressing going through life when people talk about things you don't know about. So I stay to myself so they don't know how I can't read. My boys ask me why don't I get a job paying more money. I play it off and tell them I will soon, knowing if you can't read you're going nowhere.

Recently I took a trip and when I went on a boat, I saw a lot of famous people's houses, but my camera stopped working. I felt like throwing it off the boat. You see, if I understood what I was reading when I looked at the directions, I could work the camera right.

by Jacklin Johannes

The story makes me think about how I feel about not knowing how to read. I feel like if I read

something wrong they'll know my problem and see that I can't read. You know, like my friend Susie. She's my best friend, but I know if I was to tell her my problem she would laugh at me. And I know she would tell my other friends, you know, like my boyfriend. He didn't know about me till that happened to me in court (a charge was lowered because she couldn't read). I been with him for six years and he never knew that I didn't know how to read. I am so surprised that he didn't tell me nothing when I went to see him on Monday. I was waiting for him to tell me and he didn't. I know that was a surprise to him, but then again maybe he knew and did not want to tell me nothing. I feel he knew because he didn't say nothing about that . Neither did I.

by Lisa Morales

I found out all of us in the class have something in common, like the fact that we cannot read. We try to hide it by lying about it. So we make up things like saying I can't see it without my glasses, or saying I do not understand what it is saying. Some of

us buy a newspaper to pretend we know how to read it and some of us carry a book to let people think we know how to read. We laugh or smile to play it off. These are some of the things we do to hide the fact that we cannot read. We will lie to people as well as to our own selves about not being able to read.

by Vanessa Shepherd

I also don't know how to read, just like the mother in the book. She doesn't know how to read. She feels very sad. She wants to learn how to read. She is trying to hide so nobody knows she doesn't know how to read. I know it. I know the feeling. I can't read. I felt ashamed. Of course. Like the mother in the book. I have told people that I've forgotten my glasses so people wouldn't know that I couldn't read. It's embarrassing. When the mother went to see the teacher, that's what she did. I know how she felt.

by Irene Peukert

(dictated)

I had been a long time trying to read and I was always alone and I had nobody with me to help me out. I felt embarrassed like the mother in the book, and I went out to the world to see what I can do if I can't read. So I try to get myself busy and I had many jobs of keeping my fingers busy and I made a life for myself. I've still made something out of myself, and I'm still trying to find a way that I can read. And it will take a long time.

by Frank Perales

(dictated)

Well, the mother is suffering. I know the feeling. I sometimes feel embarrassed. She cried because she wanted to read a story to her daughter but she can't. She had a complex because she can't read. Me? I want to help my son. He asks me the same. He says, "Mom, read me the story in this book." But I say I can't. I try to read it to make him feel a little bit better. He asks me why I don't know how to read,

and I explain to him about my life when I was younger. And I tell him to learn how to read and write.

by Nereida Casiano

I feel the same way as the mother does in the book. I don't feel it with my children because I don't have any children. But I feel it with other people. Sometimes I try to avoid going places because I'm afraid people will find out I can't read. My neighbors don't know I can't read. It makes me feel embarrassed. I hope one day I will be able to read, like the mother in the book.

by Bruna Rios

When I heard the story of the book about the mother that didn't know how to read and the daughter was asking her questions, begging her to help her in the school and this poor lady was making excuses, I feel the same way because I can't write and I am embarrassed when I go to the bank.

by Margaret Correa

This story reminds me of me and the excuses I used to make. I always wanted to learn how to read, so I enrolled in a reading class in City College. At the beginning it was okay. Then they changed the teacher, and the class started getting harder. With this teacher, if you learned, you learned, and if you didn't, you didn't! That's the way he was. He didn't have time to go over it with you if you didn't get it the first time. So I dropped out of that class because I felt embarrassed about my reading disability, that I couldn't keep up with the rest of the class or with the teacher. I started looking for something that would be right for me, or more my speed. I think I found it. I hope to read better and work on my G.E.D.

by Linda Blanco

"Mom Can't Read" reminds me of myself. I remember when I couldn't read nothing but little words. I had a little girl. I wanted to read to her,

so what I would do is get some one else to read to her for me. But one time I asked a person who put me on the spot. She said, it is your child; you read to her. I felt real bad because she would not read to my daughter and I couldn't read, so I felt I had to go to school and learn how to read to her myself.

by Michele Lurch

Reactions to Maya Angelou's "Men"

I think the writer of the poem "Men" tells about her experience with men and how she loves to watch them. It doesn't matter what they look like, young men or old men, winos. It doesn't make a difference. She loves them all.

--Vanessa Shepherd

I have nothing against men, but only one kind of man I hate most: that is the kind of man who abuse their wives all the time and after a while maybe they would feel sorry but only for a short time. Then they would do the same thing over and over again. That kind of man is the worst kind of animal in the world.

--Alice Schwartz

I believe that she used to stand behind the curtains and stare because she loved the way men walk down the street. She was fifteen years old, but we

know that she was young. By looking at men she felt like a woman.

--Melody Jackson

I think Maya is trying to say when you're young you go through all kinds of feelings. You start to look for someone to love. At the beginning a man will treat you like gold. After a while you are like a doormat. You get step all over. A woman can blow her mind. She puts up a guard and tries not to be hurt again.

--Jacklin Johannes

The poem reminds me of my sister Susan. I remember when I was small all she talked about was men and how she loved them. Then one day she met a nice man. He gave her all she wanted, took her all over, bought her all kinds of clothes. She had it all. A good man and everything.

After a year, everything changed. The real person was mean and a liar.By the time she found out

it was too late. She was pregnant. The real thing that happened was that after a year he told her that he had two daughters from his own sister. That was the end. My sister left him and has not seen him for about five years.

--Lisa Morales

The men go out with a lot of women. They are always going somewhere. It is very easy for her to get a man It's very hard for her to get a good man.

--Irene Peukert

Men are always going somewhere. To the stock market. They're always saying they are the master of the house. The reason that they say that is that they want to be the boss and you are supposed to be the slave. You're supposed to do everything that he tells you to. If you don't, you get yelled at.

My man is a judge of the Supreme Court (I'm just making it up). It's not easy being a judge. I wish he would have another type of business. They wind up

getting killed, too. Criminals get revenge. He doesn't like sending people to the electric chair, but his job is being a judge. He has to make a decision. Sometimes he gives a lot of time in prison, to make you think about what you did and he may go easy on you if you don't cause trouble in prison.

--Margaret Johnson

Reactions to Maya Angelou's "Life Doesn't Frighten Me at All"

Vanessa Shepherd: I can't believe that life doesn't frighten her. She tried to hide the way she feels by saying life doesn't frighten her. Some of the things she says don't frighten her probably do, like when she sees tough guys in a fight or panthers in the park or strangers in the dark. Some of these probably are the things that scare her the most.

I tried to hide the way I felt when I moved into a new building. The kids in the neighborhood tried to pick a fight with me. I was scared, but I didn't want them to know that I was afraid of them, so I fought back. Now me and the kids in the neighborhood are good friends. Sometimes if you show people you are not afraid of them, they will leave you alone. Maybe me and Maya have something in common. We try to show people we are not afraid of them by pretending we are not afraid.

Melody Jackson: I love the way she express her feeling that life doesn't frighten her at all, but sometime life can be frightening. Some people have fear in them and some don't. I feel life can be frightening but not that bad. Some time I am very happy.

I am very happy because I have my health, my life, my family, my friends, my son. But as a friend said, if you show fear people can push their way, but sometime you have to show fear, whether you want to or not.

Jacklin Johannes: It made me think about a time in March 1982 when my house was robbed. I was so scared. My husband and I had just separated. Believe me, I was frightened. But I had to pretend I wasn't frightened. Once you let someone know you're afraid, you're in for a world of trouble.

I can remember when my mother would tell me about how it used to be years ago. How you could leave your door open, you could walk around all hours of the night and nobody would try to rob you. I sit down and

I wonder why the young and old, Black and white have to be prisoners in their own homes. You look around now and you see that even God's house has bars on it. I hope before I leave this world there will be a change for the better.

Alice Schwartz: Life has a lot of things to frighten you, like you don't have enough food to eat, clothes to keep you warm or have a place to live; that would frighten you to death. Of course, it is easy to say nothing frightens you at all. But it is not that easy to fight in real life. You need to learn how to deal with life and find the best way to face it.

It is good to keep your mind strong. Don't let life frighten you, look around. Lots of people don't have what you have and they are happy with what they have, so why can't you be happy like other people?

I love the way the writer expresses her feeling of life, nothing frightens her at all. Now I should have the same feeling like her to face life, not to let anything frighten me.

Linda Blanco: I think Maya wrote this poem when she was younger and going through some bad time and didn't want people to know that she was scared. So she put on this act of a brave person and she would say life doesn't frighten her at all.

Irene Peukert (dictated): I love the way she writes. The story that she writes is very good, the way she rhymes it. It appeals to me that "Life Doesn't Frighten Me at All." It's only in her dreams. She dreams about it, the poems that she writes.

Sometimes life frightens me; yes, definitely. It's more than my dreams; it's the way it seems. The shadows on the wall frighten me. When I';m alone at night, I get frightened. I do. It's very true. What's true is true. Life doesn't frighten her as me.

Reactions to "Rainbow Jordan" by Alice Childress

Vanessa Shepherd: The story about Rainbow Jordan reminded me of when I got my period for the first time. I was 12 years old and I was in school.

I didn't know I had it until I got home and went to the bathroom and saw that I had it. At first I was scared, but I thought about what my mother said to me. She said I was going to go through something like that. She said it is all part of growing up and becoming a young lady. I still was scared, because I was just 12 years old and I didn't think I was ready to become a young lady.

Alice Schwartz: I still remember when I had my first period. I was so scared I didn't know what to do. I thought I was sick and probably would die, because my mother had never taught me about it. At that time, how stupid I was! I didn't go to ask my mother for help until three days later. The problem still was there, so I told my mother what was

happening to me. My mother didn't say anything; she only helped me take care of it. That was an experience I never forgot.

When I read about Rainbow Jordan, the memory came back to me. I'm glad I could help my daughter go through her first period. That was easy, and understanding the whole thing happening just helped her become a woman.

Maya Angelou

by Melody Jackson

I was looking at Oprah on Channel 7. I saw Maya Angelou on her show, talking about Black light-skinned women and dark Black women. This woman was saying just because you are a light skin Black woman does not make you better than a dark woman. When she was back in the 50's when she was young, Black people would say, "Girl, don't you cut your hair, won't no man want you." She also said light skin mothers would say to their light daughters, marry a light-skinned man so your children can have curly hair and light skin. The show was interesting. I did not know that Black people can dislike another Black person because of skin color. When I listened to Maya talk about the Black race, it is true Blacks dislike their own and that's a shame. If you're not light-skinned and you are dark-skinned, you don't fit in with light skin. Now I see why Blacks cannot get along with each other and that's a shame. I hope one day Blacks will look back and say to each other, whether we are light or dark in our own race we are still Black and we should

be proud of who we are as Black people.

I read so much about Maya Angelou in my basic education classes. She opened my eyes about my own race. I was happy to see such an intelligent woman speak out her opinions as a Black woman herself. Seeing her on television really opened my eyes about the poems I read in class.

Big Changes

by Alice Schwartz

My life has had big changes. I came to the United States three years ago. It is a big change for me, like all my family except my husband and my daughter still live in Taiwan. I can only see them once every year or two.

The food in my old country and in the U.S. is completely different. One is eastern, one is western; even in the United States there are a lot of Chinese restaurants, but the taste isn't exactly the same. Some times I get homesick because some kinds of food I can't get living in the U.S.

One very imnportant thing has changed my life, the basic education program. I used to read and write only Chinese and speak some English. When I started in the program with the teacher Mrs. Nava, she taught me a lot; she really opened my eyes and my mind, just like giving me a new world. I am able to read some books and write simple letters now. That makes me feel great. I know I still have a long way to go, but I

also know if I want to, nothing can stop me.

It is wonderful! My life has a big change for good. I will try my best to continue my studying.

Being Natural

by Frank Perales

(dictated)

I don't know how to begin. I haven't been around, knowing what each country sees in life. I see their lives are different, their eating is different. I can go to a Chinese place. I can go to a German place. They all have different food. I try the food from different countries and I don't like it. I don't even like the food from my own country. I just like my style, fried food. I don't spice my food. I like it plain.

My Feelings

by Nereida Casiano

(dictated)

I want to tell some of my feelings about Black people and white people. I think we should all love each other because God, in this world in the beginning, made one man and one woman. That's the way human beings started. So we all are brothers and sisters. The color doesn't matter. God made everybody to love each other, to do good, not to hate and not to do bad, because God loves everybody. If we love God, we should love everybody.

I want to say that one day a colored man took me in the street. He put a knife to my throat and he almost killed me. He beat me up. But I escaped from him. I went to a police station and they took me to the hospital. Then the police showed me some pictures and I saw him in one picture. They took him and found out that he had killed six women and I was going to be the seventh. But just because this happened to me I don't hate Black people because in this world there are good and bad people of every color.

On My Own

by Lola McBride

I moved uptown around a month and a half ago. It is a nice place to be. Before I moved there I lived around a lot of people and I got used to it, yet I like being by myself.

Project

by Glenda Roberts

In 1974 a friend of mine brought her four children into the U.S.A. to live with her. It was not easy at first, but she was determined to make it on her own. Friends told her to get some help from the public. Jane was not keen on the idea. She was taking care of four teenagers, all of whom were going to school and doing very well.

Jane was very proud of her children, especially her son. He would get up early in the morning, make breakfast, wake up his mother at 6:00 a.m. to give her a cup of coffee. This was very nice of him.

But sometimes she could strangle him, in a loving way of course. Yes, she was proud of her son. He would go to high school for four hours, then to trade school for another four hours, and after school he would be home to eat. Some friends of his had a workshop, not too far from his home. After eating, he would go there and help on cars, to get the experience. He did this for a while.

Then he graduated from school. John had a job

working on cars. He was well liked on his job because he did very good work. Everything was fine for a while until he started to make new friends. He would go out every Saturday night, wear the best clothes. People who knew his mother, when they saw her, would always have something nice to say about her son. Then gradually he began to change. He was using pot. His mother talked to him. John said, na, na, I don't use the stuff. She said to him you can fool some people most of the time, but you can't fool your mother none of the time. As time passed he became nervous and couldn't sleep at night. He was afraid, saying someone is out to get me, and he could hear voices talking to him. She took her son to see a doctor on a regular basis. He was hospitalized for several weeks.

After four years, John is not better. He went back to the Caribbean in 1983. He still needs help, but he has to want and ask for it.

Whose Problem Is It?

by Linda Blanco

I have this problem but it's not really mine; it's my brother's. I try to help him by calling up different clinics. They told me that I was not the one that should call, that it was up to him to make the first step by calling and admitting that he had a crack problem.

My brother, Larry, is only 23 years old and the type of guy that didn't smoke or drink, he was studying to become a police officer, and now the only thing that matters to him is crack. I don't know, but this thing with crack is getting out of hand. On Tuesday there was this movie called "Cracked Up." I told him to watch it but he was too busy cracking up. It's getting to the point that I don't want him in my house or near my son. I don't know exactly how my mother feels about it, but I can tell you that I can't take it any more.

Reactions to "First, They Said" by Alice Walker

I feel very sorry for the black people because they are trying so hard to stand on their own feet and the world doesn't give them too much of a chance. Some people always find excuses to keep them away.

Like this poem, "they" said that they are savages, they are immoral, they are inferior, they are backward people, etc., even though that is not true. I hope the black people will try the best way to make themselves strong, and fight together to show the whole world they are just as good as any other race. Maybe some day their dream will come true.

I think the writer points out a lot of things to tell people what is right and what is wrong, to remind people to give them a chance to improve themselves. This is the most wonderful poem I have ever seen before. I like it very much. From this poem I learned that you should give other people a chance; then you give yourself a chance too, and the world will become wonderful and peaceful.

by Alice Schwartz

Savages are wild animals. I was taught this. To think of humans as savages is a disgrace to all people.

In this world we live in we meet all sorts of people, lots of nice ones, but some hateful ones, hateful Blacks, hateful whites. What do we get out of hating one another? Only pain. I don't know how much, but in some areas there is progress between Blacks and whites. Some of us did not grow up with lots of things, but I didn't know what prejudice was. One might not have basic education, but when wrong has been done to you, we can learn from this because two wrongs do not make a right. That's why education is a must. God made all of us and he did not make no junk.

by Glenda Roberts

The first thing that came to my head when I heard the beginning of the poem was that she was talking about black and white people, that the white people was telling them how they were immoral, inferior,

savages, backward people, obstructing progress and how they eat too much and take up too much land.

I don't know if that is what she was trying to say, but that's what came to my head. If she was talking about racism, there is still a lot of it going around all over.

by Linda Blanco

I think the writer of the poem "First, They Said" talks about how people are prejudiced against one another and they put down Black people and how they feel about them, like when a white man said me and my family stole his tools and we said we did not, but he did not believe us. He told the policeman we stole his tools and the policeman started to search us , but he did not find anything on us. But the white policeman took a white man's word.

by Vanessa Shepherd

In "First, They Said" I think she is trying to say that some white people prejudge the Black race by

saying we are savages, immoral, inferior and backwards. Some famous Black people had to work very hard to get to where they are today. Some Blacks were never taught to use their heads, only their bodies for labor. Some Blacks started to believe what was said about them. I think Reagan and a lot of the ones working in the White House, fit right into what "they" have been saying about us.

by Jacklin Johannes